

# IS MY CHILD EATING ENOUGH?

Parents often worry that their healthy infant or toddler isn't eating enough. The rapid (pound a month) growth of a healthy infant normally slows down at about age 6 months and settles by age 18 months into a slow, steady pace until their teenage growth spurt. A parent's goal is to guide their child toward a lifetime of good eating habits, not to focus on fixed amounts of food intake. Encourage healthy eating habits by providing healthy meals at regular times, in forms and textures appropriate for your child's age. Keep him company during mealtimes. Try to eat as family and be a role model. Here are a few tips to help keep you sane::

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Toddlers eat  
like a bird  
one day,  
and like a  
horse the next!

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by Evelyn Selber, MD

- Older infants' and toddlers' eating habits vary greatly day to day, and they often decide to test their independence at mealtime.
- Their preferences are often for simple foods and favorites.
- Try introducing a small amount of a new food next to a favorite.
- Give smaller portions - if hungry they'll accept a second helping.
- Recognize when food battles have begun and **back off**.
- Remember you are in charge of deciding what foods to offer, and your child is in charge of deciding whether to eat it or not. If your child refuses the meal you offer **it's not your job to become a short order cook** providing a menu of endless choices each meal.
- When your child is hungry he'll eat if you offer a reasonable variety of healthy choices.
- Avoid distractions such as TV or toys to encourage eating. Don't coax, bribe, or bargain over food.
- Let desserts (good choices are fruit and yogurt) be part of the meal, not a reward afterwards.
- Cut down on excess juice intake.
- Milk intake for toddlers should not exceed 24 ounces daily, then offer water and fresh fruits as additional fluid sources.

Don't equate food rejection as rejection of you! Recognize your child's cues that eating time is over. Playing with food, climbing out of the high chair, spitting out food, batting away offerings of food, turning his head away, and pursing lips shut all say "I've had enough, thanks!" If he eats poorly at one meal he'll often make it up at another. As you lessen the pressure to eat and allow your child to learn to eat because he is hungry, you'll be setting the stage for healthier eating habits in the future. (For more information see the AAP publication [A Guide to your Child's Nutrition](#))



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